

By Jessie Stephen

One Penny

FLAPDOODLE ABOUT "FLAPPERS"

JF2(42)
D35



I.L.P. PUBLICATION DEPARTMENT
14 Great George Street, London, S.W.1

FLAPDOODLE ABOUT "FLAPPERS."

By JESSIE STEPHEN.

CERTAIN capitalist newspapers have signified their utter contempt for women by their application of the term "flapper" to the proposed new women voters. When the Great War started and the great game of bluff was being played, that was not the word used then. Women had to be flattered, coaxed, cajoled by high-sounding phrases which these same newspapers best know how to coin. But then gratitude is not a lasting virtue with them. The leopard does not change its spots so easily.

This change of front will have done some good if it only awakens women to register their emphatic protest at the ballot box when the opportunity arrives, by voting solidly for Socialist candidates. Our movement has consistently and persistently advocated adult suffrage from its very inception. Socialists have never quibbled about it, or qualified their support. *The older political parties have!*

It is not from mere gratitude we ask women to support our candidates, though we have some claim to that, but on the grounds of ordinary commonsense. For all the talk about women who are not interested in politics, even *they* cannot escape the throw of the net when a bad Government begins to fish in troubled waters.

Throwing Away Jobs.

An example of this is to be found in the present Government's break with Russia. "What do I care?" demands she who is not interested in politics. But suppose her husband to be an engineer, a textile worker, or one employed in the fishing industry, just to mention the more obvious trades affected adversely by this decision. Will she be satisfied to know he is unemployed as a result? And maybe *she* is, too!

Scores of thousands of workers in the engineering industry alone have lost their chance of employment through governmental stupidity. The product of their toil, sold to the Russian Soviet Government, would have meant an easing of the burden the wives have to carry when they have to depend only on what the unemployed engineer draws from the

Labour Exchange or from the Poor Law Guardians. It would also mean lighter rates, since every man withdrawn from the receipt of relief and placed in employment reduces the amount required by the Guardians for this purpose. Thus we see the housewife is hit in two directions. Her husband loses possible employment. The rates go up because he and others similarly placed have to apply for relief, and all due to the antics of a Tory Government.

The Trade Unionist's Wife.

Will it comfort the married woman to know, when her husband is on strike or locked out, or if she herself happens to be called on strike, if still employed in industry as so many thousands of married women are, that she could have prevented the election of a Government responsible for the Anti-Trade Union Act, when its powers are invoked to make the strike abortive? This Act has loaded the dice in favour of the employers and the worker is so hedged around with restrictions and prohibitions that striking has become almost too risky, even where there is every indication that the employers are entirely in the wrong. Concerted action on a national scale to improve low wages in a particular industry, or sympathetic action to help other trades unionists is rendered impossible. Yet the woman who refuses to interest herself in politics is just as loud in her grumbles at the low wages of her husband or possible reductions in them, as her sister who very definitely does take the trouble to vote.

Or suppose she goes to the chinaware department of the stores and finds as a result of "safeguarding" duties imposed on "crocks," will she offer up thanks for the glorious privilege of paying more for them? When she discovers that there is a tax on artificial silk stockings, on lace, on ribbons, on many of those little items which women require for their personal adornment, and which sends up the price, will she be grateful to the wise politicians who have made this possible? One hardly thinks so.

"Woman's Place in the Home."

Unless she is altogether mentally deficient, it must have some interest for her when rents go up while wages come down. "Woman's place is the home" is the stock phrase of the opponents of woman suffrage. From this we are to understand that politics can have no interest for her. In the past, women have accepted this deduction as being quite logical. But is it?



Practically everything in a woman's life or about her home is directly or indirectly affected by politics, as we shall see. Dear food and clothes, dear gas and coal, all mean something to the woman in the home. In what way are these items affected by politics? Let us take food first. A Food Council has been set up, but without any statutory powers. When it discovers instances of gross profiteering, or restriction of production to raise prices, all it can do is to give publicity to this robbery of the housewife and the community generally.

Food Prices Would Come Down.

Suppose though, we had a Socialist Government, with no tender feeling for vested interests or monopolistic ramps. Surely the first thing we should expect such a government to do, on being advised by the Food Council that prices were too high, would be to take legislative action against the profiteers in order to protect the housewife. Prices would come down as a result of government interference. But this is politics, and the woman in the home has no interest in them, we are told.

Taxes would be abolished on everything which appears on the breakfast table, and the housewife thus enabled to buy more with her housekeeping money. Is this a matter of such small moment to a woman struggling on an inadequate wage to make both ends meet, that she would sooner see a Tory Government returned rather than assist in the return of a Socialist Government? Is she to be so indifferent to her own best interests? Not if she wants less worry and care!

Even women "uninterested" in politics are appalled by the plight of the miners, their wives, and their children. They subscribe, often quite liberally, to the charitable funds raised to alleviate the terrible distress in the mining areas, when, by the simple exercise of the vote, they might help to return a government which would make private charity unnecessary by a thorough reorganisation of this basic industry. Of what use is charity to a man who prefers to work for a wage which will ensure as a minimum, the ordinary every-day necessities of life for himself and those dependent upon him? It is like putting the cart before the horse.

What About Houses?

A wise foreign policy would soon lead to increased employment and at the same time avoid the risk of future wars, which inevitably bring sorrow and misery to working-class homes. Constructive schemes at home would also relieve

unemployment to an unbelievable degree. By a well-considered house-building programme such as was outlined by the last Labour Government, the shortage of houses could be met within a reasonable term of years, which is more than any capitalist government is prepared to do. Private enterprise, for which the Tory Government stands, is not concerned with the needs of the housewife. Profit is the one consideration which determines whether or not houses are to be built. So far as the capitalist or his representatives in Parliament are concerned, the populace may live in pigsties if there are no nice fat pickings to be obtained by housing us well.

To Keep Down Rents.

There is another side to this however, which ought to interest the housewife. If and when a Socialist Government is returned, pledged to overtake arrears in housebuilding, this programme is carried out with all necessary speed, landlords will find it impossible to get the inflated rents they are now receiving for housing people in places not always in a good state of repair. It is with the utmost difficulty the woman in the home is able to persuade her landlord to paper her walls or do necessary repairs, although the rent she is paying is proportionately, a very much higher one than our so-called social "superiors" are paying for their mansions.

Best of all is the knowledge that thousands of unemployed men in the building trades will find plenty of work building these badly needed houses. Again relief to the rates, and increased spending power for their wives. Increased spending power naturally brings in its train more work for other unemployed men and women who produce the things they are then in the position to afford. All this done through politics! Yes, but politics with a difference. Politics informed and imbued with the high ideals of Socialism which accounts human life of greater value than vested interests.

The Babies and Children.

Babies have an interest for the woman who does not care for politics. She is as anxious as the rest of us to preserve the little mites from harm, to see them grow into strong and healthy men and women. How can this be when the government, on the plea of economy reduces the grants to maternity and child welfare centres, starves the social services which endeavour to reduce infantile mortality as the present government is doing? It was a Labour Government which restored the fifty per cent. grant which has enabled Socialist Councillors where Labour rules to achieve astounding results

in the reduction of infantile mortality, in some cases cutting it in half within a very short term of years.

Socialist Councils have shown what can be done to improve the health of the citizens by clearing slums, improving public amenities, installing sunlight treatment centres, providing medical and dental advice either free, or for a small sum. The proof that their work is appreciated is shown in the fact that in most cases they are returned with bigger majorities each time. It is only in districts which have never tasted these efforts in municipal Socialism that electors are gulled by stories of Socialist inefficiency and extravagance.

Tory Governments starve the educational services on the plea of shortage of money, but not one of them has ever found difficulty in spending the best part of the national income in paying for old wars and preparing for new ones. Much is said about our two million "surplus women," but has the single woman ever stopped to ask herself why there are so many women who are denied for ever the right to mate? Nearly one million Britishers were killed in the Great War, slaughtered in all the glory and strength of their young manhood. Many of them of course were already married. They left widows and children to mourn their loss. Others were engaged to be married, or must have been eventually had they lived. Their potential wives lost their one chance of setting up home with them.

The End of War.

War is not inevitable, and never has been. Only the crass stupidity of capitalist politicians is responsible for these dreadful holocausts. Socialism does not believe in allowing things to drift, but in taking steps well in advance to secure friendship and lasting peace between all the countries of the world. Under Socialism we may expect to see huge reductions in this wasteful expenditure on preparations for war. More, we shall see the disappearance of armies, navies, and air forces altogether, and the settlement of international disputes round a table.

In that happy day, the young woman will have no dread of losing her lover, the wife her husband, the mother her son, in another blood bath. Ten million men were killed altogether in the last one, and these marching in single file would make a procession ten thousand miles long. The British dead alone, walking twenty abreast would take ten days to pass a given point. It would take four months for the whole of the killed, allied and enemy, to pass a given point, marching in the same formation. For every V.C.

awarded, one hundred thousand wooden crosses were raised over soldiers' graves.

Yet the right kind of politics could have prevented this, and will prevent it in future, if every woman vows to vote Socialist in future.

Marriage and the Birth Rate.

Now that we are discussing marriage or its possibility for many of those called "flappers" by ignorant press magistrates, it is as well we should look at another aspect of the problem. Quite recently many of the newspapers were discussing the tremendous drop in the marriage rate, the lowest since 1886, with the single exception of the year 1917, but not one of them attempted to give the real reason for this fall. Some stupidly talked about the reluctance of the modern girl or young man to undertake the responsibilities of married life assigning as the reason that they were too fond of a good time!

With rents so high, the cost of living a problem, and low wages, with possible future reductions, with unemployment figures well over a million, what else can be expected? The young woman who marries under these conditions is asking for trouble, and she will get plenty of it! This is recognised by those who think at all, so rather than adventure into marriage on insecure conditions they remain single. In other words bad government has spoiled the young woman's chance of marriage even when she has a lover. A Socialist Government by its domestic and foreign policy would restore her opportunity, by promoting a freer flow of goods to other countries and thus increasing opportunities for employment, and by helping the workers to get higher wages.

Under a Labour Government wages rose. Since the Tories came to power, wages have dropped again. Here is clear proof then that there is no salvation for the "flapper" or for the woman in the home, until Socialists are in power.

Last, but by no means least, a Socialist Government can, by legislation, fix a Living Wage for all workers in industry. It can make provision for Family Allowances which will raise the whole standard of living and take away the fear of insecurity which hampers and harasses so many women now. Women know too well how their husbands are driven back to work defeated after a bitter conflict with employers because they cannot see their wives and children suffer by holding out longer. Family Allowances will kill this evil power which the employers wield in industrial disputes,

Politics of No Interest?

So much as I have outlined here is but half the story. Other instances will readily leap to the mind of the inquiring woman, and all these things can be done by taking an interest in politics, but particularly in Socialist politics. Socialism means absolute equality between the sexes, greater opportunities for developing the best in human nature, gives men and women a chance to aspire to something higher than grubbing in the mire all the time for the crumbs and bones which Capitalism throws to the wealth producer.

Shall the woman in the home neglect so great a responsibility? Will she still say, "Politics have no interest for me?" Is the young woman in the factory and workshop who is soon to be called upon to exercise her privilege of voting for the first time, going to stand aside or vote for capitalist politicians what time her conditions of employment are worsened and the opportunities of employment reduced. Wisdom and commonsense dictate but one answer. Join up now and prepare for the coming struggle! Bombs, guns, rifles, are worse than useless. Votes can do all we require.

You Should Now Read

- SOCIALISM FOR WOMEN. I.L.P. Study Syllabus.
By Minnie Pallister 6d.
- MRS. SMITH OF WIGAN. *By Minnie Pallister* 2d.
- SOCIALISM AND CHRISTIANITY. *By J. Keir
Hardie* 1d.
- ALL ABOUT THE I.L.P. *By A. Fenner Brockway* 1d.

*Full list of I.L.P. Pamphlets and 8-page Catalogue
sent post free on application to*

I.L.P. BOOKSHOP

14, GREAT GEORGE STREET, WESTMINSTER, S.W.1.